

Plymouth portent

Pact reached, '97 Thanksgiving clash still weighs heavy

By Judith Gaines
GLOBE STAFF

The main parties to the dispute over the Thanksgiving protest in Plymouth last year — town officials, police, the United American Indians of New England — agree about the significance of the controversial settlement reached there Monday: It is historic and potentially precedent-setting.

But whether it bodes well for a peaceful Thanksgiving Day in the nation's hometown this year remains an open question.

Although Native Americans have protested the Thanksgiving celebration and annual "Pilgrim's Progress" reenactment in Plymouth for 28 years, the settlement marks the first time town leaders have officially recognized an alternative interpretation of Pilgrim behavior.

"This is the first time the town has publicly said, 'We invite the Native Americans to gather in Plymouth and to march,'" said Eleanor Beth, Plymouth town manager. "We've acknowledged that they have a right to tell their side of the story."

Under the pact, both protesters and police were cleared of wrongdoing in last Thanksgiving's angry confrontation, in which 25 Native Americans were arrested during their annual protest near Plymouth Rock. Police were accused by the demonstrators of using excessive force, including pepper spray, to disperse them.

Also under the settlement
PLYMOUTH, Page B7



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/TOM LANDERS
Moonanum Roland James and Mahtowin Munro helped reach Plymouth compromise.

Portents in Plymouth pact

■ PLYMOUTH

Continued from Page B1

reached Monday, protesters agreed not to sue the town for injuries received. Town officials authorized \$100,000 for education about Native American history, \$20,000 to pay the United American Indians of New England's legal fees, and \$15,000 for two plaques presenting Indian views of Thanksgiving.

For too long, Thanksgiving has been "a celebration of Pilgrim mythology," said Moonanum Roland James, an Aquinnah Wampanoag. "By this agreement, our story becomes part of official Plymouthdom."

He said the group expects a large turnout for its Day of Mourning demonstration Nov. 26, which will be held from noon to 3 p.m., and he hopes it will be peaceful.

But patrolman Paul Boyle, a spokesman for the Plymouth Police Brotherhood, said police feel betrayed by town officials who negotiated the settlement — and they doubt the demonstration will occur without problems.

"Our feeling is that it's not going to be a very good Thanksgiving," Boyle said.

Police feel the settlement's concessions, monetary and otherwise, "give people the mistaken impression we did something wrong," Boyle said. They intend to force town leaders to rescind the settlement. "We'll stay in their face for as long as it takes to redeem our reputation."

Police also believe town leaders are "extremely naive" if they expect UAINE members to keep their word.

Police "want local Native Americans to tell about their plight," said Boyle, explaining that they typically have been peaceable. He described UAINE, by contrast, as a group of "a few Indians and a lot of other radical activists who travel around the country supporting each other at their protests."

According to James, UAINE is a loose organization that he co-leads with Mahtowin Munro, a Lakota Sioux, and they act with advice and approval from a council of elders consisting of two Wampanoags and one Penobscot Indian. They have no membership list or meeting structure, but convene and act in the Indian way: by consensus.

The group was formed in 1970 by James's father, Wamsutta Frank B. James, a Wampanoag who headed a now-defunct club called the Federated Eastern Indian League.

To celebrate the 350th anniversary of the Pilgrim arrival in the Americas, Pilgrim descendants had planned a state dinner in Plymouth, and invited Wamsutta James to speak there. He agreed, but when planners saw an advance copy of the talk, they decided it was too inflammatory, his son said.

In the 1970 speech, the elder James had written, "The Pilgrims had hardly explored the shores of Cape Cod for four days before they had robbed the graves of my ancestors, and stolen their corn, wheat and beans."

He continued: "Massasoit, the great Sachem of the Wampanoag, knew these facts, yet he and his people befriended the settlers of Plymouth Plantation ... We wel-

comed you, the white man, with open arms, little knowing that it was the beginning of the end; that before 50 years were to pass, the Wampanoag would no longer be a free people."

James refused to revise his speech and did not attend the dinner. When word spread that his talk had been suppressed, he and others declared Thanksgiving to be a National Day of Mourning and gathered on Cole's Hill in Plymouth to express their grievances.

Some demonstrators at that first gathering formed UAINE. In addition to sponsoring the Day of Mourning each year since then, group members also speak about native history at schools and colleges, demonstrate against what they consider racist mascots for sports teams (such as the Cleveland Indians), and support Native Americans whom they believe are unfairly victimized by the US government — such as Leonard Peltier, an Ojibwa-Sioux wrongly convicted, they say, of shooting two FBI agents.

About 40 locals attended the Plymouth selectmen's meeting Tuesday night to protest Monday's settlement, and roughly 30 police picketed outside town hall, Beth said.

John Perry Ryan, a UAINE supporter who says he was injured in last year's melee, said he expects as many as 3,000 demonstrators this year — compared to about 400 last Thanksgiving — and that the observance will be peaceful if police behave lawfully.

"We can't project the future," Boyle countered. "But we'll be there and we'll be prepared for whatever happens, just as we were last year."